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"Working with the Teacher-as-Researcher:
A Vehicle for Conduct of Basic Research and Staff Development"

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School people are accustomed to researchers soliciting their participation in studies; and they feel, with some justification, that these studies end up rewarding the researchers and not the subjects. We tackled this problem by designing a study where each teacher was the researcher and the object of study was her own teaching. This approach gave all parties, teachers, researchers, and administrators, what they wanted. Over the past 2 years, 30 teachers, K-8, in Concord and Lexington, Mass. have been through the process. Both school districts have now invested small sums to support the work and teacher commitment continues to be most encouraging.

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I. Introduction

A common criticism of educational research is its failure to reach practitioners with useful results. Some say the findings themselves are not useful, others that the problem is one of language and communication. But the problem is real.

Teachers are skeptical of research and those who do it; they view researchers as removed from classroom reality -- ignorant of teaching's true demands, and unable to produce information they can use to improve classroom instruction (and feel better about themselves.) These feelings do not come out of the blue; there is a basis for them...experience.

School people are accustomed to university researchers and graduate students soliciting their participation in studies; and they feel, with some justification, that too often these studies end up rewarding the researchers and not the subjects, whatever the original good intentions. Too often the nice young graduate students get their dissertations done, the professors get their articles published, and they all disappear. And the practitioners are left not much better off than before.

Phase 1: Gathering Data

We tackled this problem by designing a study where each teacher was a researcher and the object of study was his/her own teaching. Each teacher was guided in this intensive self-study by a university researcher who both interviewed the teacher about her teaching and video-taped samples of classroom interaction. The role of the university researcher at this point was to gather data about a comprehensive set of "parameters of teaching" that they brought to the study. Researchers further examined classroom materials, teacher planning, student products, and reviewed video-tape samples with the teachers to probe the nature of their instructional decision making. They were then ready for Phase 2 of the study: feedback sessions between researcher and teacher to fill out, confirm, or deny items in the data base to produce as full and accurate a picture as possible of the teacher's teaching.

Phase 2: Feedback

The "parameters of teaching" the researchers bring to the study purport to be comprehensive and to be rationally related in a Theory of Teaching that explains what teaching, as an entity, is. (The Theory meets Snow's criteria as "C-Theory," Conceptual Theory.) After the feedback sessions in which the teachers learn the concepts and language of the "parameters of teaching" through analysis of their own behavior, Phase 3 begins, the training phase.

Phase 3: Training

Teachers' versatility or range has been measured on behaviors in these "parameters," and the study hypothesizes that if the scale for measuring the parameters is valid, it should be possible to extend the teacher's range up to points not currently attained.

So in Phase 3, the teacher and researcher mutually select certain parameters, certain teaching behaviors on which to build training. The selections are based on the teacher's current profile with whatever strengths or gaps in repertoire it might reveal, and on 2 other things: a) teachers' felt needs: they simply want to learn about or broaden themselves on certain aspects of teaching. b) the nature of the curriculum: analyzing the curriculum, its objectives, learning experiences, evaluation systems, the teacher and researcher together agree on certain teaching behaviors demanded (or at least useful and relevant) to this particular curriculum. Thus they compile a list of priorities for training which the researcher provisions and delivers himself, either directly or through other members of the research team in a program of presentations, demonstrations, workshops, and role-plays. Then in Phase 4 teachers are interviewed and video-taped again to analyze current teaching behavior against predictions.

The result of this pattern of research is that all parties get what they want. Teachers come to better understand their own teaching and receive a cohesive and relevant staff development program. They get specifically 1) a confidential written analysis of their teaching developed through a safe 1-to-1 relationship with the researcher, 2) video-tapes of their teaching for study, 3) audio-tapes to keep of their feedback sessions with the researchers, 4) analysis of their curricula, 5) direct training in self-selected aspects of teaching.

Researchers get 1) a sample of teachers on which to improve accuracy and reliability of their observational instrument (the Teaching Range Inventory) and 2) a body of data from which to validate a) their scale for the parameters, b) the Theory unifying the parameters, and c) the parameters themselves as concepts.

The school administration gets free or inexpensive staff development that extends through an entire school year for those involved. In order to build confidence of administrators and of teachers, it was necessary for the researchers to offer less-involving, less risky staff development workshops and training courses in more traditional formats during year 1. Thus the school district also gets the benefit of a broad-based staff development program with multiple entry points differentiated by the amount of time, involvement, and trust teachers can commit to their professional development.

Summary

Our objective was to perform significant basic research on teaching in such a way that not only would the findings be useful to practitioners, but conducting the research itself would benefit them. Over the past 2 years, 30 teachers, K-8 in Lexington and Concord, Mass. have been through this process. Phases 1 and 2 have been completed (15 teachers in year 1; 15 additional in year 2.) Teacher reaction has been sufficiently enthusiastic to begin Phase 3 this coming year with those 30, and to enter 20 new teachers at Phase 1 in the fall. Only our own limited resources prevent enrolling larger numbers. Both school administrations have now invested small sums to support the work and teacher commitment continues to be most encouraging.

II. Implications

From a research point of view this study was fruitful. Bob Gower, my colleague from Boston University, and I have developed an instrument. It's reliable and we have validated the concepts behind the parameters. We're still working on it, but we feel that when it comes out soon it will be a useful contribution. It's quite far reaching, incorporates multiple levels of inference, and is novel in its profiling of teachers' range on curriculum, instruction and classroom management behavior. It embeds the idea that there is no one right or best way of teaching but many ways. What is important is broadening one's repertoire to the point where one can pick modes of instruction that match the needs of different learners. But my purpose here is not to report on the T.R.I. instrument. I want to tell you what we have learned about its implications for staff development over this year.

As we are proceeding with phase 3 of the study, we have been put more into the role of staff developers with the teachers working with us and had our "research" role diminish. This is both our intention and our pleasure. In the process we have elaborated a "personal service" model of staff development. In the pages to follow I would like to describe what I mean by that and how it has evolved as a natural consequence of the research. The case I wish to make is that this model of staff development offers great potential for effectiveness, and that those who operate it need a sound grounding as expert analysts of teaching using the kind of multiple lens approach with which we scanned the teaching of the participants in the study.

Staff development means helping teachers to be better teachers. That is my personal definition, but I think most people engaged in staff development would agree that improving instruction is our mission and that the teacher is the key to that. Those of us in staff development focus primarily on the teacher as opposed to the curriculum or the improvement of facilities or other valid avenues for improving what children receive as their school experiences. Our subjects are people, teachers. It is my observation that staff development in public schools is addressed in 2 distinct ways: through "activities" and through "personal service" with a continuum of offerings in between. In this paper I want to make the case that the personal service route is particularly effective in terms of outcomes and in terms of what one gets -- what teachers get and thus what children get -- for an in-service dollar spent. The project described in the introduction was a research project, but it was also a staff development project along the personal service model. The project isn't over, but when it is I think we will have evidence for the case I shall outline here.

The test of effectiveness of staff development work is changed behavior in the classroom. Some changes are harder to see and measure than others, but they are there nevertheless if the staff

development work has meant anything. If teacher stress happens to have been the focus and that stress has been reduced, a teacher will feel differently and behave differently and one will be able to see that and talk about it; perhaps one will be able to see connections between that change and the experience of students. If keeping the "momentum" of classroom events moving smoothly, or teaching reading to high-risk primary children has been the focus, the results in changed teacher behavior and improved instructional outcomes will be easier to see. Let's go back now and look at the range of staff development offerings I mentioned above.

When "activities" is the orientation of a staff development program, one finds someone in the district organizing events. Maybe it's a committee, or a group of principals, or several people working separately. The events they organize are activities offered for teachers usually in the form of workshops. (Most everything gets called a workshop these days, no matter what the pattern of events actually offered. They may combine lectures, group discussions, and sometimes making materials to take away.) Often these offerings proceed from surveys sampling teachers' needs. The workshops are organized around a theme or topic. Sometimes those responsible for staff development will organize a series of such activities for release afternoons (if they exist) developing a single theme. Workshops on working with the gifted are popular just now.

A different and rarely found orientation to staff development focuses on providing personal support, continuity and expertise to teachers directly through the agency of a particular person (sometimes called the "staff developer.") What the staff developer does with each teacher-client in his/her purview differs and is tailored to individual needs. What remains constant, however, across all teachers with whom this staff developer works is the provision of personal support, continuity and expertise.

Personal support is what the teacher feels as a result of the relationship. The staff developer makes moves that make the teacher feel this person is on their side, is working on their behalf, and even cares about them as a person. The staff developer is disconnected from teacher evaluation. When things get tough there is someone to talk to, but also someone who can help, sometimes through direct intervention/participation in solving the problem.

Second, the staff developer provides continuity, meaning they are not here today and gone tomorrow. They are here today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow and beyond. They are available over a continuous period of time spanning years, not just a series of workshops. They have time for teachers. They have perspective on the teacher over time and on the teachers' students over time, and are able to bring that perspective to problem analysis and solving.

Third, the staff developer provides expertise, meaning he or she is knowledgeable about some areas the teacher isn't. The staff developer must have something substantive and new to offer teachers that they do not already know. This does not make them superior; they are colleagues. Staff developers who work with teachers in their classrooms are always learning from them. But this collegial relationship does not obviate the need for some real expertise, some real knowledge about teaching and/or content methods and/or analyzing children which can be offered to teachers.

School districts look on creating positions to provide these functions as an expensive proposition. I think it is one of the most cost effective things a school system can do in terms of measureable outcomes, changes for the better in a teacher's teaching, providing improved instruction to children. And I speak from some experience, having held such a job for over 3 years in the Cambridge Public Schools. That job existed because there were federal magnet-school monies to pay for it. Others of its kind exist elsewhere, but always for the same reason -- external funding.

A word about the "activities" approach before proceeding: I'm not trying to put it down. One good idea from a workshop (or a magazine article for that matter) can strike a responsive chord, be received by the right person at the right time, and be translated into new teaching behavior almost immediately. In between random staff development activities and the personal service model is a continuum with more and more of the 3 elements (personal support, continuity, expertise) creeping in. My case is that the continuum is an OK-good-better-best one, where the best is so much better than the others that it shouldn't be neglected as it is now. But I have still to make that case.

In a recent issue of "Educational Leadership" dedicated to staff development, Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers reviewed the sequential steps necessary for maximally effective in-service training. Teachers must experience stages of:

1. awareness
2. understanding of concepts and principles
3. demonstration (modeling)
4. practice
5. feedback by an observer about how they're doing
6. coaching on site for improving performance

I am aware that these 6 assume a particular "training" conception of staff development, but let's stick with it for a minute. The message is that if you really want to help a teacher change a behavior or acquire a new one, you do all 6 steps. Last fall Lois Sockol of the Newton Public Schools and I designed and taught an in-service course on Reading for the High-Risk Primary Child. We taught this course in the Lexington Public Schools and included the first 4 steps above in our course,

even doing a good bit of role playing with the participants with ourselves playing children to approximate steps 5 and 6. This course received outstanding evaluations from its participants, even rave reviews. I write that not to pat us on the back, but to contrast it with the ending competency of the teachers who participated. They had a long way to go in becoming proficient at the method. In a competency based evaluation which Lois and I made for our own information, only 1 out of 15 teachers could actually "do" the method at the criterion level. As wise commentators have urged, we should blame the teaching, not the students. Now, that competency result was not surprising to us since the teachers did not practice the method much in their classrooms, received no feedback when they did, nor any coaching on site in how to do it. In a rerun of the course this summer we are supervising all the participants between class sessions as they apply it with children during a 5 week summer school. We fully expect everyone to achieve competency under these conditions. During the 5 weeks we are with these people we will certainly be providing continuity and expertise. If we are good staff developers we will also provide personal support. People who sign up for the course are probably looking mostly for expertise. They want to know more, have more teaching skills so they can be better teachers. We have a particular body of expertise to offer them in service of that goal, but because we offer it through a staff development model that provides appropriate stages from awareness through coaching, or in our terms, provides personal support, continuity and expertise, we think it will be highly effective.

Another article in the same A.S.C.D. journal by Fred Wood and Steven Thompson expanded the terms of effective staff development provided by Joyce and Showers. The second article adds: "clear objectives, individualization, options and choices in learning activities, learning activities related to learner (teacher) interests and needs, developed responsibility (meaning the teacher taking responsibility for the learning), and trust and concern between teacher and trainer (or developer or facilitator, or whomever.) I would like to ask you to keep these and the previous 6 attributes in mind as I get on with the case of this paper. What does all this have to do with the project "Teachers-as-Researchers?"

If "expertise" is a component of being an effective staff developer, what are the things about which that person could have expertise? My answers are 4: children, teaching, content methods and materials, and institution building. These 4 areas comprise the key bodies of knowledge and skills for the professional teacher...and thus for the staff developer. By knowledge of children I mean knowing about child development, both cognitive and emotional and being able to use that knowledge to understand children's behavior and learning needs. By knowledge of teaching I mean the whats and how tos of all the functional missions nowadays called "teaching skills." By knowledge of

content methods and materials I mean specific teaching techniques related to specialized bodies of knowledge, like use of Cuisenaire rods or chip-trading games to teach mathematics. By institution building I mean the interpersonal skills and commitments with which professionals build effective working relationships and a feeling of belonging to a worthwhile entity.

The reading course in Lexington referenced above is an example of an offering from content methods. It's about a specific method of teaching reading. The Teacher-Researcher project was about teaching itself, another of the 4 areas in which staff developers could provide expertise. The body of knowledge we developed in the study was a broad based set of functional categories or missions that all teachers perform, or are at least confronted with by definition in the act of teaching...things like getting and maintaining children's attention, keeping the momentum of classroom events moving (management parameters); things like choosing models of teaching appropriate for content and matched to students' styles and needs (instructional parameters); things like evaluating different kinds of student performance, like choosing appropriate learning objectives (curriculum parameters). These parameters of teaching comprised what might be called a job description of teaching. These are the things, the situations, the issues, the decisions that all teachers are thrown up against in their work. How they handle them is another thing. We conceived all the possible ways we could think of, read about, or see in ethological type observation that teachers might handle them, and listed these ways as the possible range of behavior on each parameter. With the teachers, then, we profiled their own teaching on each parameter, showing the congruence between their talk (interview) and their behavior (observation); and with the teachers we then examined their displayed range on each parameter for appropriateness to their curriculum intentions and to the characteristics of their students. We developed an instrument for displaying these profiles, an instrument that represents objectively what teachers do on each parameter and shows that in relation to the total range imaginable.

Elsewhere I have 400 pages spelling out how these parameters were constructed and validated. All that is too lengthy and inappropriate for the present purpose, however. The point is what we did with the profiles for staff development. In this year's work, Bob Gower and I are working with teachers and we already have the instrument; we already have the parameters. We're always looking to refine them but when we work with teachers they know we are bringing these concepts to an analysis of their teaching. The culminating feedback session with them takes about 2 hours and they love it; it absorbs them totally. Never before have they had so much information to work with in analyzing themselves. The data we give them is non-judgemental; it is objective, empirical. "Here's what I saw you do..." type of thing, but across so many aspects of teaching, through so many different lenses, that it leaves them exhilarated and/or deeply thoughtful. (It might leave them simply overwhelmed but that we have a couple of warm-up sessions with groups of the teachers after data collection but

prior to feedback so they have some idea what the parameters are all about and what kind of feedback they can expect.) As we go through each parameter we ask teachers to make judgements about the appropriateness of their displayed range and from their own judgements and choices a direction emerges for what areas they wish to pursue for their own professional development.

As we work with each teacher a new body of knowledge is being created...knowledge about that teacher's teaching. And the teacher and the researcher have created it together. First the researcher has assembled data through observation and interview. Then together they have pored over the data to fill in gaps and then to interpret it all in light of the teacher's situation, her intentions for curriculum and for individual students. The teacher has become a student of her own teaching and has the responsibility, with the support of the researcher, for determining a course of action based on that knowledge.

A common orientation has developed between the teacher and the researcher. It is that teaching is something to be known, something to be understood so it can be controlled. And working together the two people pass the teaching under the scrutiny of multiple lenses for viewing its reality as fully and comprehensively as possible. This is both an objective and a professional attitude that looks to make the study of teaching a substantive, a practical, and a supportive enterprise toward the improvement of instruction.

In the personal service model of staff development people must be free to work with teachers on a continuous basis, and they should be expert analysts of instruction. Our current work is aimed at developing an in-house corps of such people in school districts and helping them to become expert analysts of teaching. The major obstacle is getting such a corps funded. I was once a nearly full-time staff developer in a public school doing just what I have outlined above (only I didn't at that time have the parameters to work with.) But, as described previously, I and the teachers had the luxury of our relationship because the federal government was paying for it. School districts don't have funds for this kind of position these days. They don't think they can afford it (meaning it's not very high on their priority list, for multiple reasons you can probably deduce without my listing them.) So our efforts are aimed at starting small, demonstrating the power of the personal service model, and sliding over time toward ever closer approximations of the full model. And we hope that as that is accomplished and as we can document the model's effectiveness and the commitment it generates from teachers serviced by it, that funding will no longer be a problem.

We further realize that to be an effective staff developer in the personal service model one needs to be more than an expert analyst of instruction. There are skills of relationship building,

of communication, and of organizing and provisioning essential to success. We are addressing these this year in ways this presentation does not allow time to cover. But the starting point has been the attitude and the analytical tools for the joint study of a teacher's teaching that grew out of the research project outlined in the introduction. It is our hope and our belief that staff development will come to see one of its roles as assisting teachers to become scholar-researchers of their own teaching.